Graphic Novel

INDIAN MYTHS AND LEGENDS

LAKSHMIBAI

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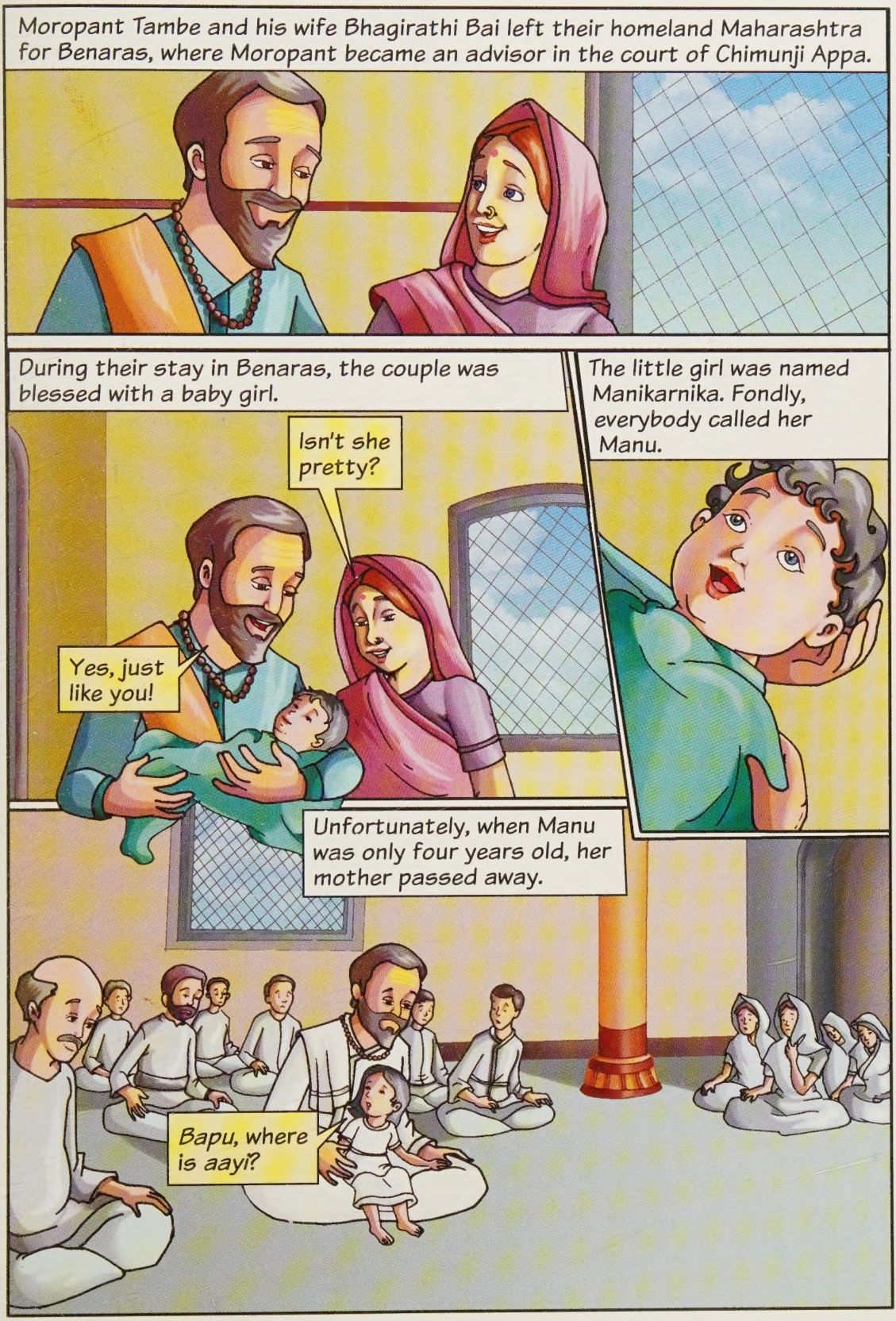
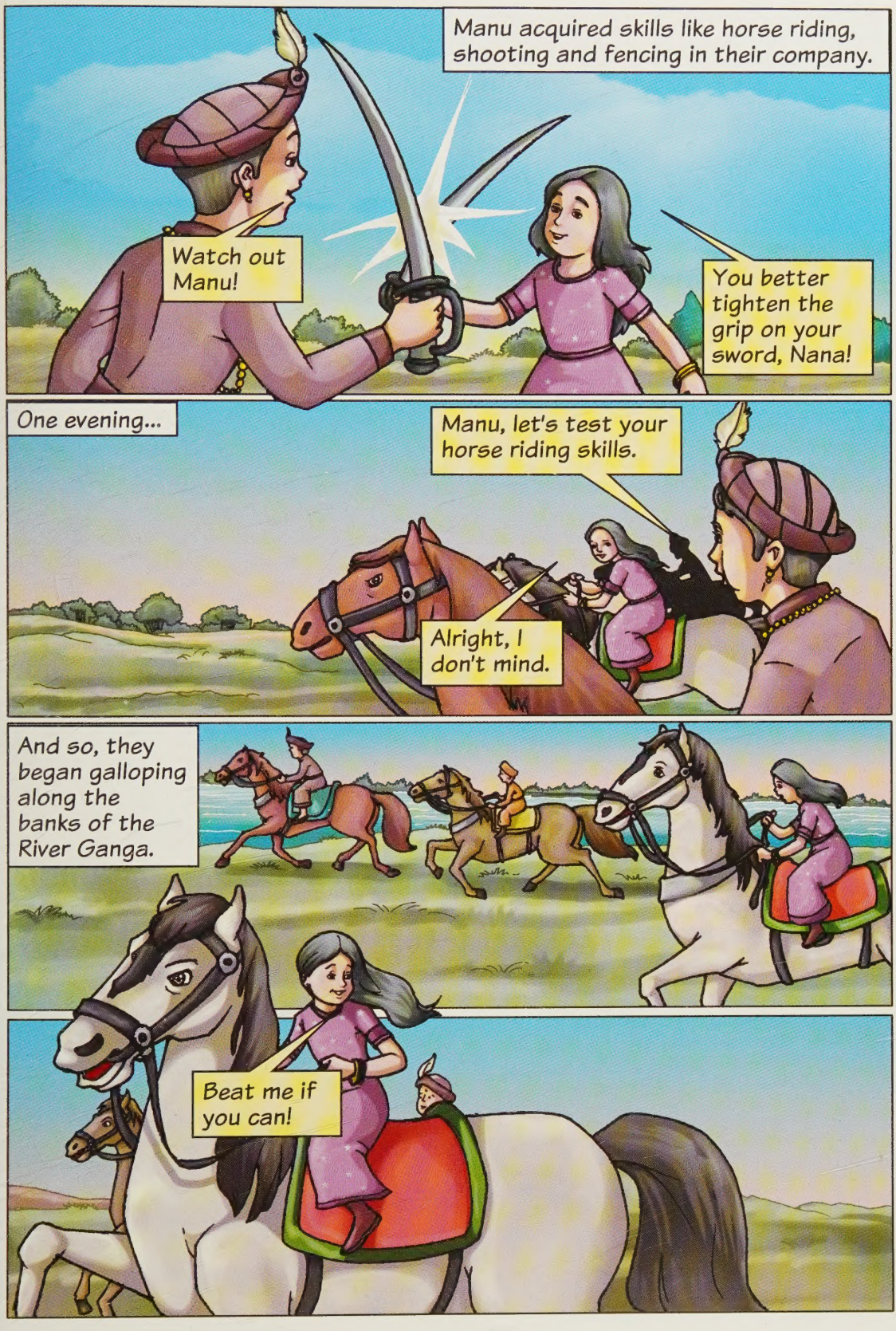
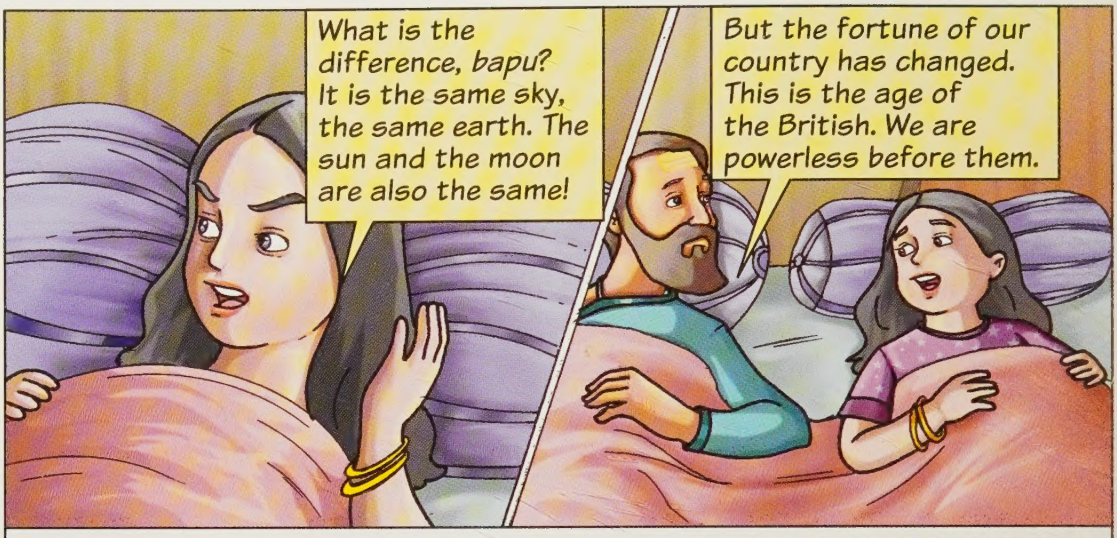

Moropant Tambe and his wife Bhagirathi Bai left their homeland Maharashtra for Benaras, where Moropant became an advisor in the court of Chimunji Appa.
During their stay in Benaras, the couple was blessed with a baby girl.
Isn't she pretty?
Yes, just like you!
The little girl was named Manikarnika. Fondly, everybody called her Manu.
Unfortunately, when Manu was only four years old, her mother passed away.
Bapu, where is aayi?

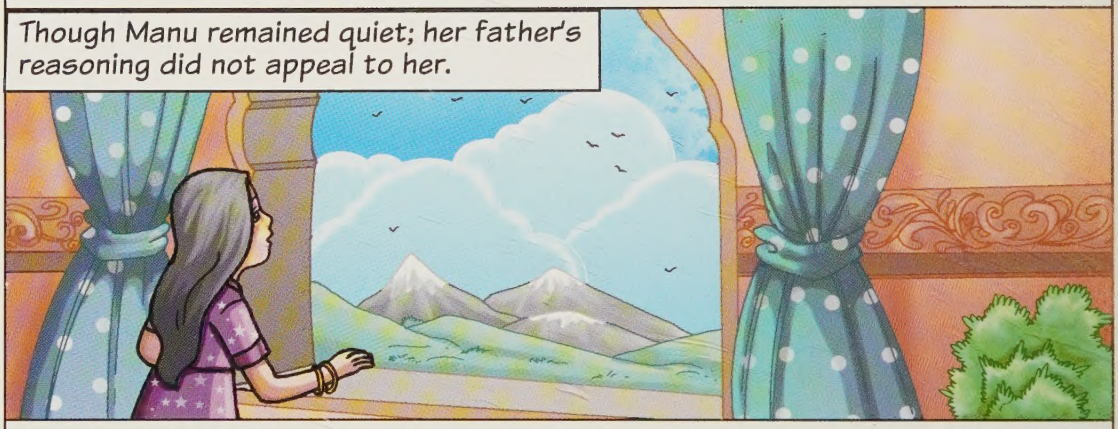
Some time later, after the death of Chimunji Appa, Moropant left Benaras.
Where are we going?
We are going to Bithur, Manu.
On reaching Bithur Moropant joined the last Peshwa, Baji Rao II —the brother of Chimunji Appa.
Your Majesty, I am honoured to join your services.
Manu was growing up. She never enjoyed the things which the other girls liked.
Come, let's play a sword fight!
Shouldn't we play with dolls?
In Bithur, Manu met Nana Saheb and Rao Saheb, the children of Peshwa Baji Rao II.
Let's pretend we are soldiers fighting in a war!
Yes, that will be great fun!
Manu was also introduced to Tatiya Tope, who later proved to be a life long friend.


Manu acquired skills like horse riding, shooting and fencing in their company.
Watch out Manu!
You better tighten the grip on your sword, Nana!
One evening...
Manu, let's test your horse riding skills.
Alright, I don't mind.
And so, they began galloping along the banks of the River Ganga.
Beat me if you can!

Manu, now see how I shall defeat you!
Suddenly...
Nana, watch out!
Aah! I cannot get up. Manu, please help me!
Moropant, the children have not returned and it is already dark.
They'd be safe, my lord. Do not worry.
When...
Your Excellency...

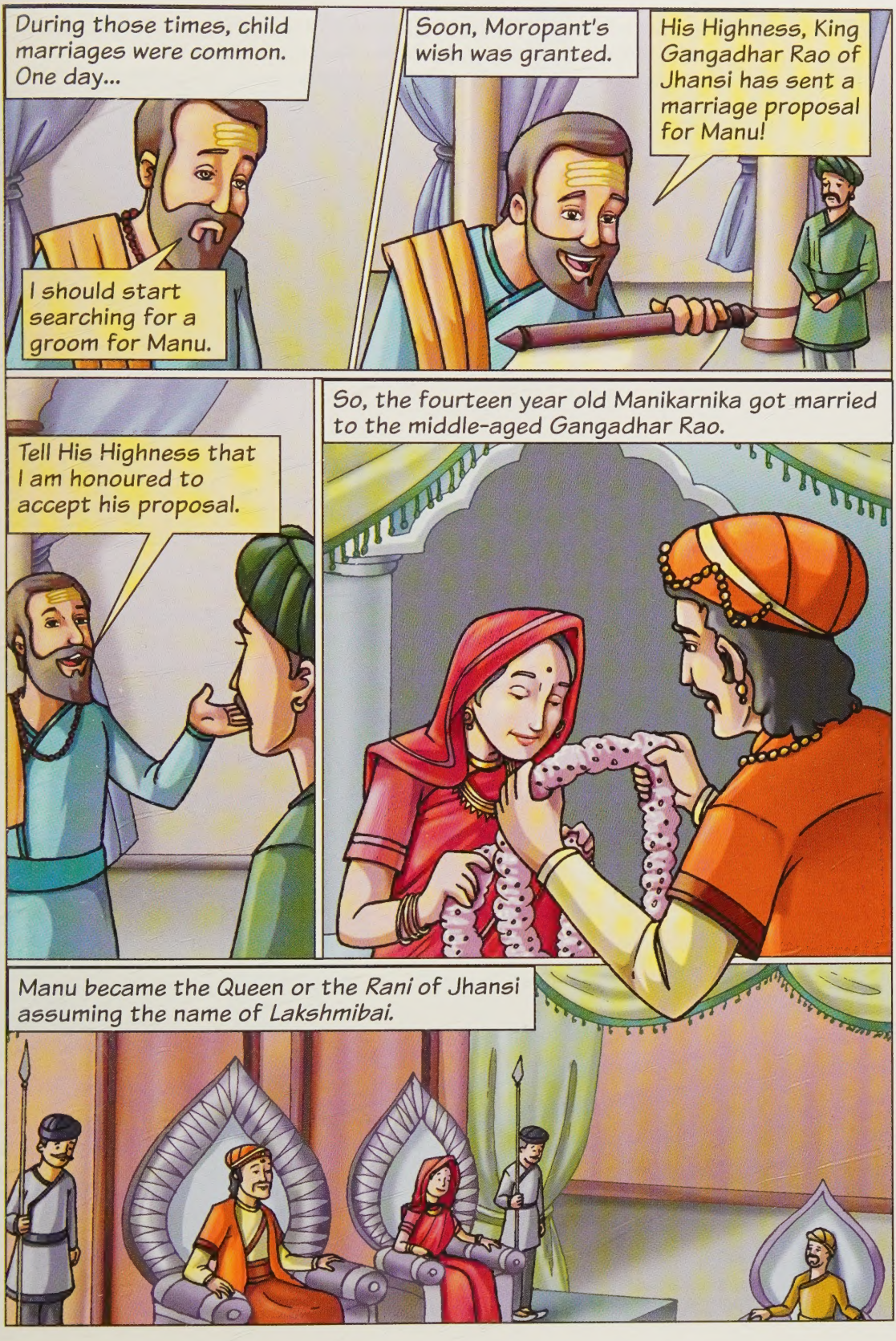
My children! What happened?
Nana Saheb is a little hurt.
Summon the royal physician at once!
That night at Moropant's house...
It was unfortunate that Nana was so seriously hurt today.
Those times were different, Manu.
But *bapu*, he was only a little hurt. Didn't Abhimanyu fight although he was seriously injured?


What is the difference, bapu? It is the same sky, the same earth. The sun and the moon are also the same!
But the fortune of our country has changed. This is the age of the British. We are powerless before them.



From her childhood, Manu was a voracious reader. Reading made her confident and aware.

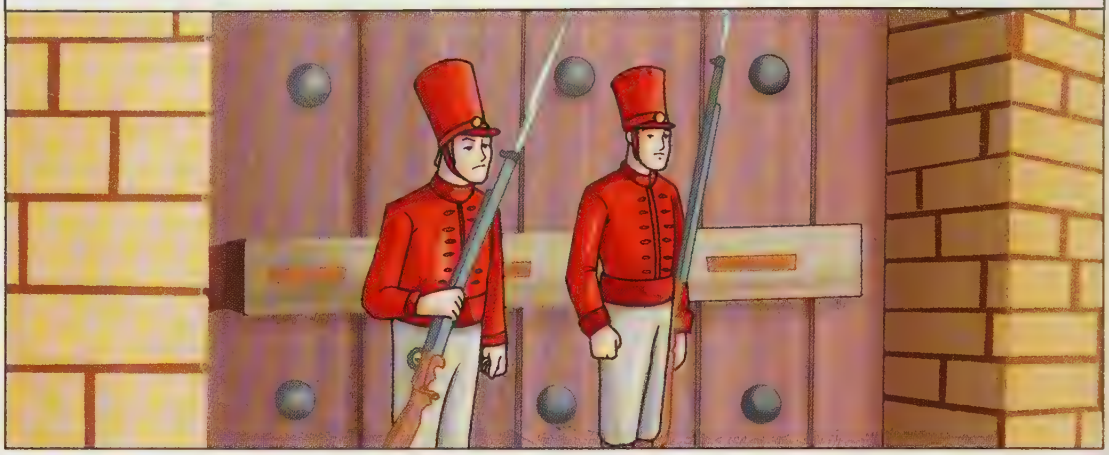
Often, Moropant narrated stories of notable women like the brave Jeejabai and Tarabai to his little daughter.


During those times, child marriages were common. One day...
I should start searching for a groom for Manu.
Soon, Moropant's wish was granted.
His Highness, King Gangadhar Rao of Jhansi has sent a marriage proposal for Manu!
Tell His Highness that I am honoured to accept his proposal.
So, the fourteen year old Manikarnika got married to the middle-aged Gangadhar Rao.
Manu became the Queen or the Rani of Jhansi assuming the name of Lakshmibai.

Meanwhile, there emerged a powerful political power in India under the name of British East India Company.
East India Company
At that time, the kings of northern India were often at war with each other.
Attack!
They thoughtlessly took the help of the British to subjugate each other.
Help me defeat my neighbouring kings. In return I shall give a portion of my kingdom to you.
Thus, the British who had originally come as traders, gradually became rulers!
The East India Company will pay you a pension of eight lakh rupees a year and in addition give you the jagir of Bithur.
The Marathas had been defeated in the third Anglo-Maratha War. Unwilling to fight the British, Baji Rao II fled. He was later banished by the British to Bithur.

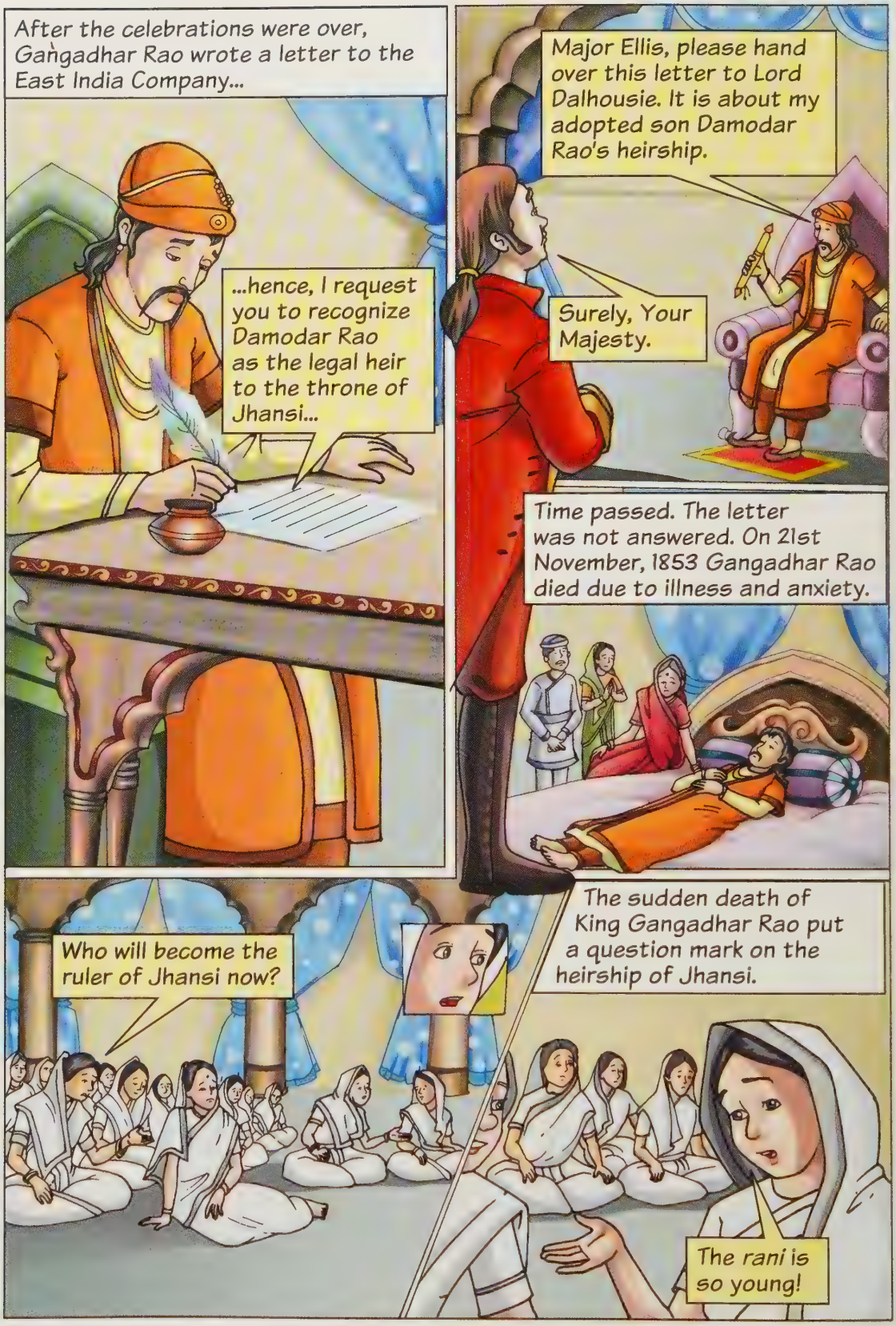
The governor of Jhansi (a city under the Marathas) had signed a treaty with the British, pledging loyalty. So, when his grandson Gangadhar Rao ascended the throne of Jhansi...
We are sure the Maharaja remembers the terms.
Secondly, our consent is necessary before you choose the next ruler.
Whenever we need help, Jhansi has to help us.
After his ascension, Gangadhar Rao improved the condition of Jhansi considerably.
I've heard the king has improved the army as well!
Jhansi is seeing good days at last.

According to the treaty, a portion of the British army was always stationed at Jhansi.

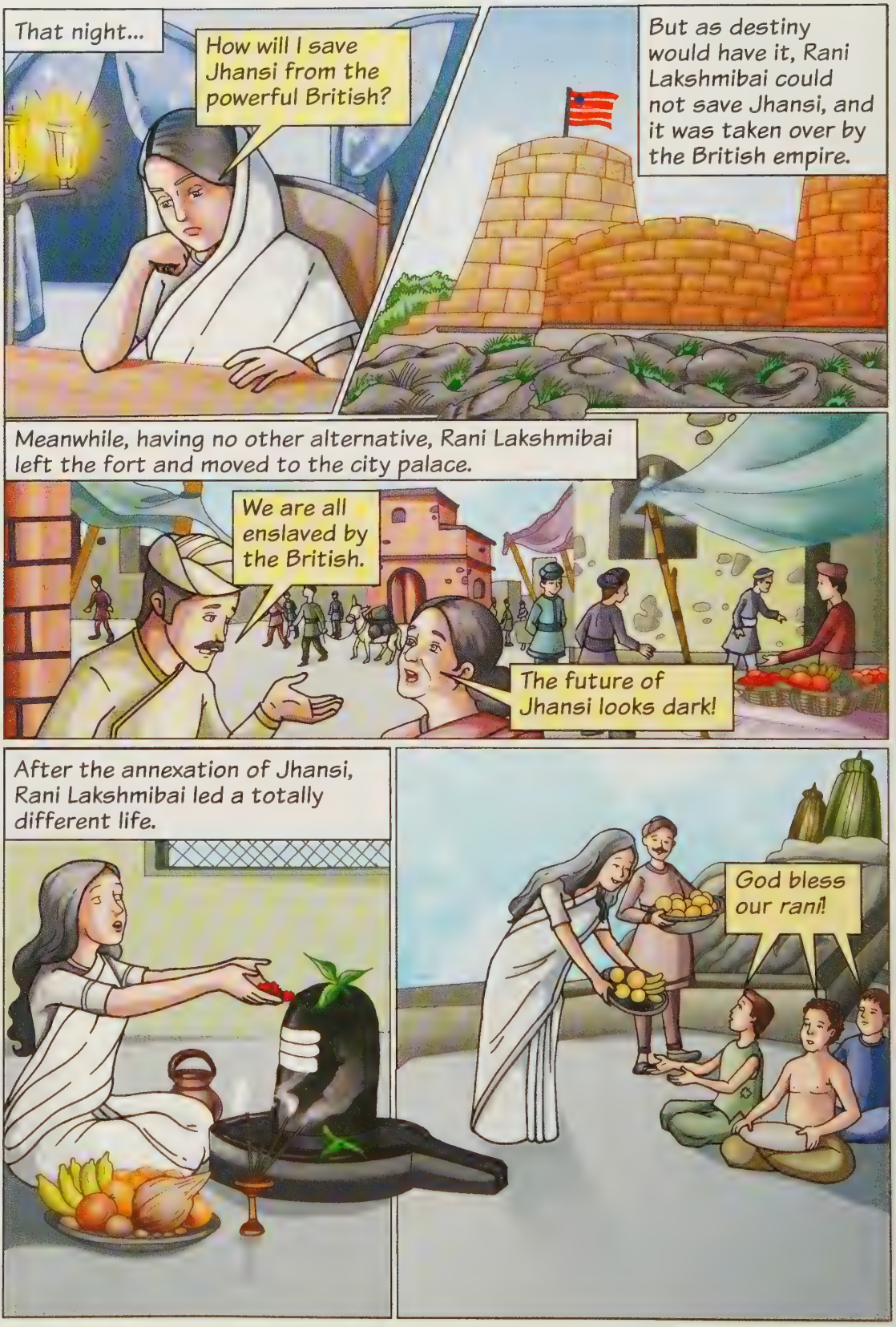


Meanwhile, nine years after her marriage Rani Lakshmibai gave birth to a son.
But fate was ruthless. Within four months of its birth, the child died.
Gangadhar Rao who was ill and aging was worried about Jhansi's future.
Lakshmi, what will happen to the throne of Jhansi after my death?
Do not talk of death, Maharaja. We will find some way out.

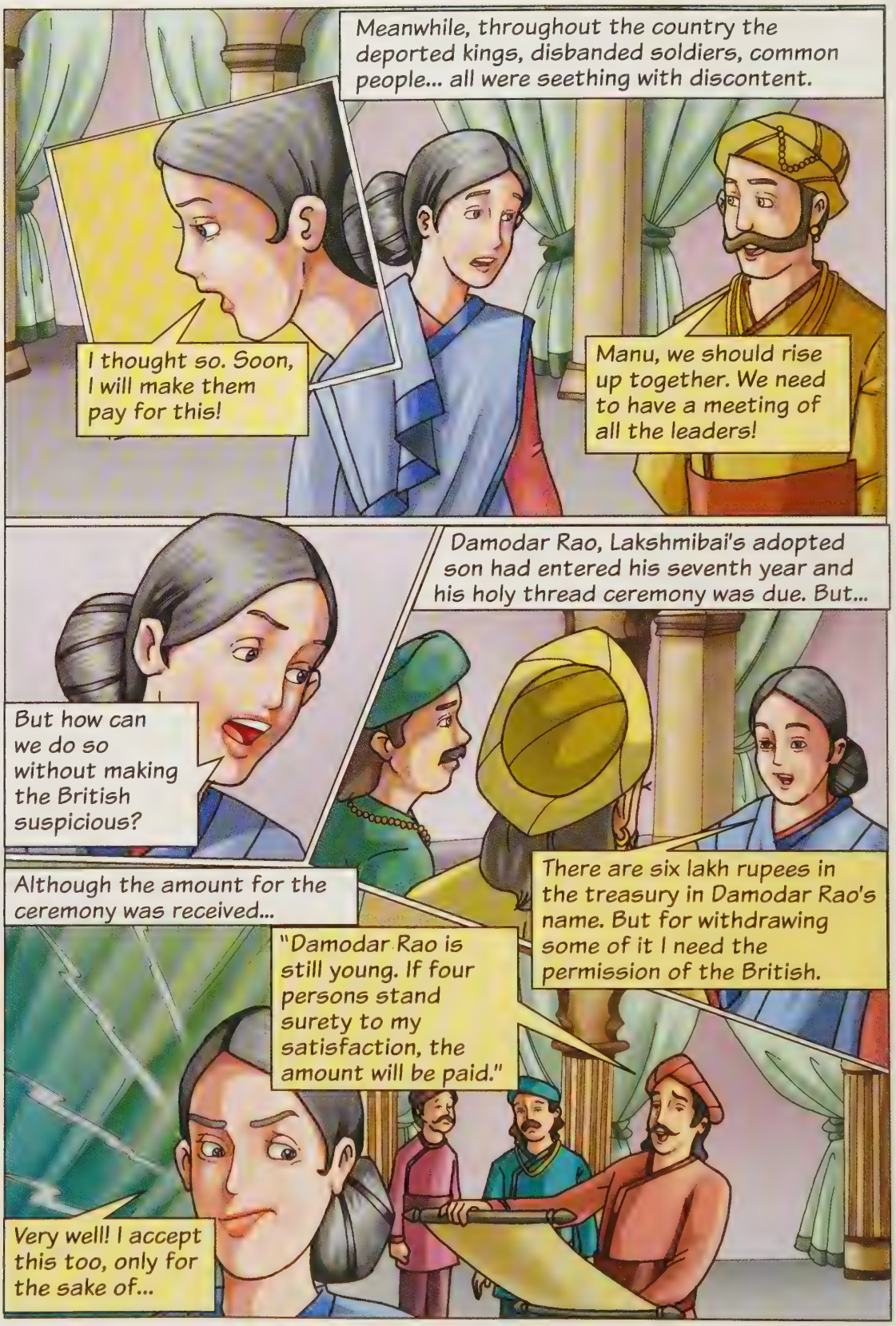
Adding to the distress was the cruel law enforced by Lord Dalhousie, the then British Governor General.
The law states if a king dies heirless, the kingdom would be seized by the East India Company.
If we adopt a child, he can rightfully become the heir.
You are right. Let us adopt Anand Rao. He can become our lawful heir.
Five year old Anand Rao was a distant relative of Gangadhar Rao.
Anand Rao was adopted in accordance with the religious norms and renamed Damodar Rao.


After the celebrations were over, Gangadhar Rao wrote a letter to the East India Company...
...hence, I request you to recognize Damodar Rao as the legal heir to the throne of Jhansi...
Major Ellis, please hand over this letter to Lord Dalhousie. It is about my adopted son Damodar Rao's heirship.
Surely, Your Majesty.
Time passed. The letter was not answered. On 21st November, 1853 Gangadhar Rao died due to illness and anxiety.
The sudden death of King Gangadhar Rao put a question mark on the heirship of Jhansi.
Who will become the ruler of Jhansi now?
The rani is so young!

Rani Lakshmibai sent a number of petitions to Lord Dalhousie for a decision on the Maharaja's representation.
Three months have passed, but there is no reply from Lord Dalhousie!
Finally, one unfortunate day...
Lord Dalhousie has sent his order regarding the heirship of Jhansi, Your Highness.
I will never surrender my Jhansi to the British! Never!
The Company does not recognize the right of the late Maharaja Gangadhar Rao's adopted heir. It has been decided to merge Jhansi with the British provinces. The Rani should vacate the fort and live in the palace situated in the city. She will be paid a monthly pension of rupees five thousand.

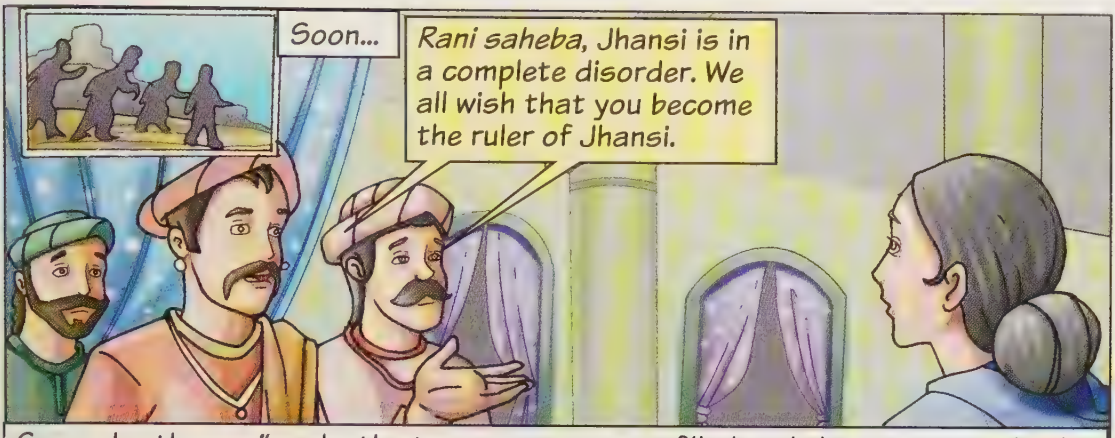

That night...
How will I save Jhansi from the powerful British?
But as destiny would have it, Rani Lakshmibai could not save Jhansi, and it was taken over by the British empire.
Meanwhile, having no other alternative, Rani Lakshmibai left the fort and moved to the city palace.
We are all enslaved by the British.
The future of Jhansi looks dark!
After the annexation of Jhansi, Rani Lakshmibai led a totally different life.
God bless our rani!

And then...
Watch your sword, soldier!
CLANG!
But rani saheba, why strain yourself so hard? You hardly get enough time to rest.
I'm a Kshatriya woman. I must prepare to fight for my cause.
I wish to go to Benaras as per the custom for the widows. But I have to seek permission from the British to leave Jhansi.
But as expected...
Rani saheba, you have not been granted permission to go to Benaras.


Meanwhile, throughout the country the deported kings, disbanded soldiers, common people... all were seething with discontent.
I thought so. Soon, I will make them pay for this!
Manu, we should rise up together. We need to have a meeting of all the leaders!
Damodar Rao, Lakshmibai's adopted son had entered his seventh year and his holy thread ceremony was due. But...
But how can we do so without making the British suspicious?
There are six lakh rupees in the treasury in Damodar Rao's name. But for withdrawing some of it I need the permission of the British.
Although the amount for the ceremony was received...
"Damodar Rao is still young. If four persons stand surety to my satisfaction, the amount will be paid."
Very well! I accept this too, only for the sake of...

The leaders got an opportunity to meet during the holy thread ceremony.
Send invitations to Tatiya Tope, Nana Saheb, Rao Saheb, and the Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar for the ceremony.
Enough is enough! We all should rise up in revolt against the dictatorship of these outsiders!
There is discontent in the army as well. The British have introduced a cartridge greased with the fat of the holy cows. As expected, the Hindu soldiers have refused to tear it with their mouth.
Not only that; the cartridges are also greased with pig fat which is deemed unclean by the Muslims.

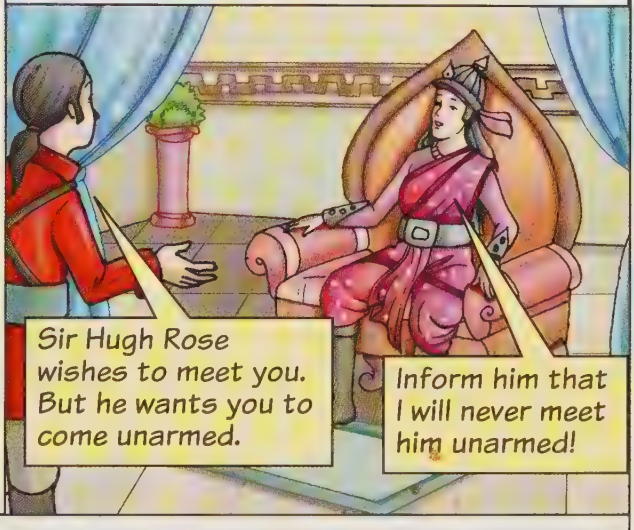
It was decided that throughout the country people would rise in revolt on Sunday, 31st May, 1857.
We should not do anything in a hurry. The army is not yet ready.
But things soon took a different turn. Mangal Pandey, a sepoy at Meerut revolted openly against the new rules on 10th May, 1857.
We will not tear off the cartridge. Do what you can!
And thus, began the mighty sepoy mutiny or the Revolt of 1857, which spread like wildfire to the northern parts of India...
Har har Mahadev!
Allahu Akbar!
On 4th June 1857, the British Star Fort in Jhansi was attacked by some rioting soldiers and looted.
Rani Lakshmibai acceded to the request of the British to shelter the women and children.
Rani saheba, sheltering the enemy would not be a good move.
Our war is against the tyranny of the British, not against helpless children and women.



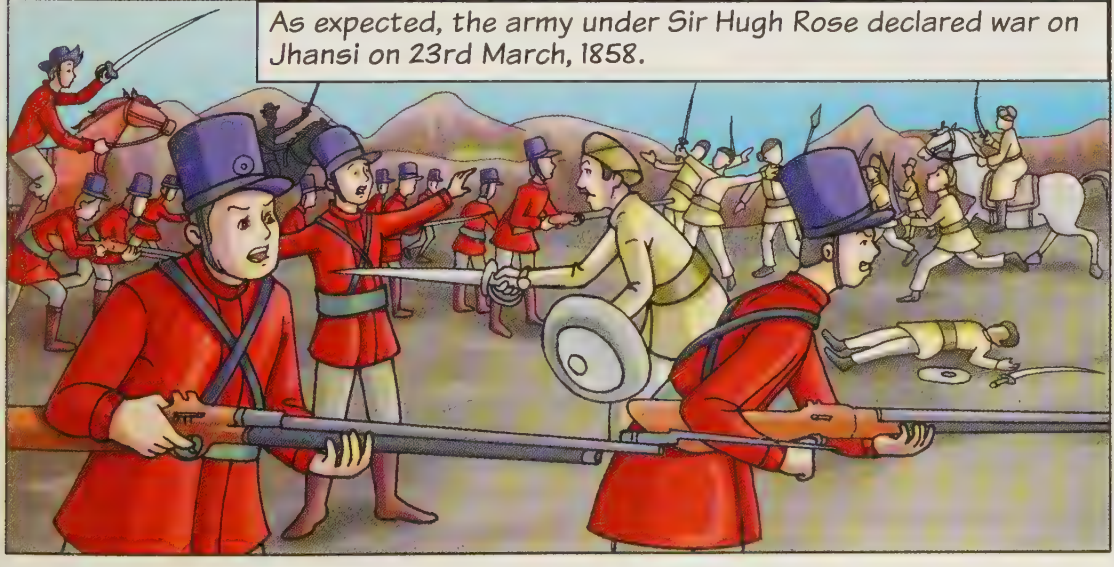
So, under the rani's rule, the treasury was soon filled and the army organized.

Jhansi prepared for a war with the British.

Meanwhile, an army under the command of Sir Hugh Rose reached Jhansi.



As expected, the army under Sir Hugh Rose declared war on Jhansi on 23rd March, 1858.



The state of Jhansi battled for ten or twelve days. Unfortunately, no help came from outside.

When Hugh Rose's army entered the city, the *Rani* herself took up arms.

We will not surrender! We will fight till the end.

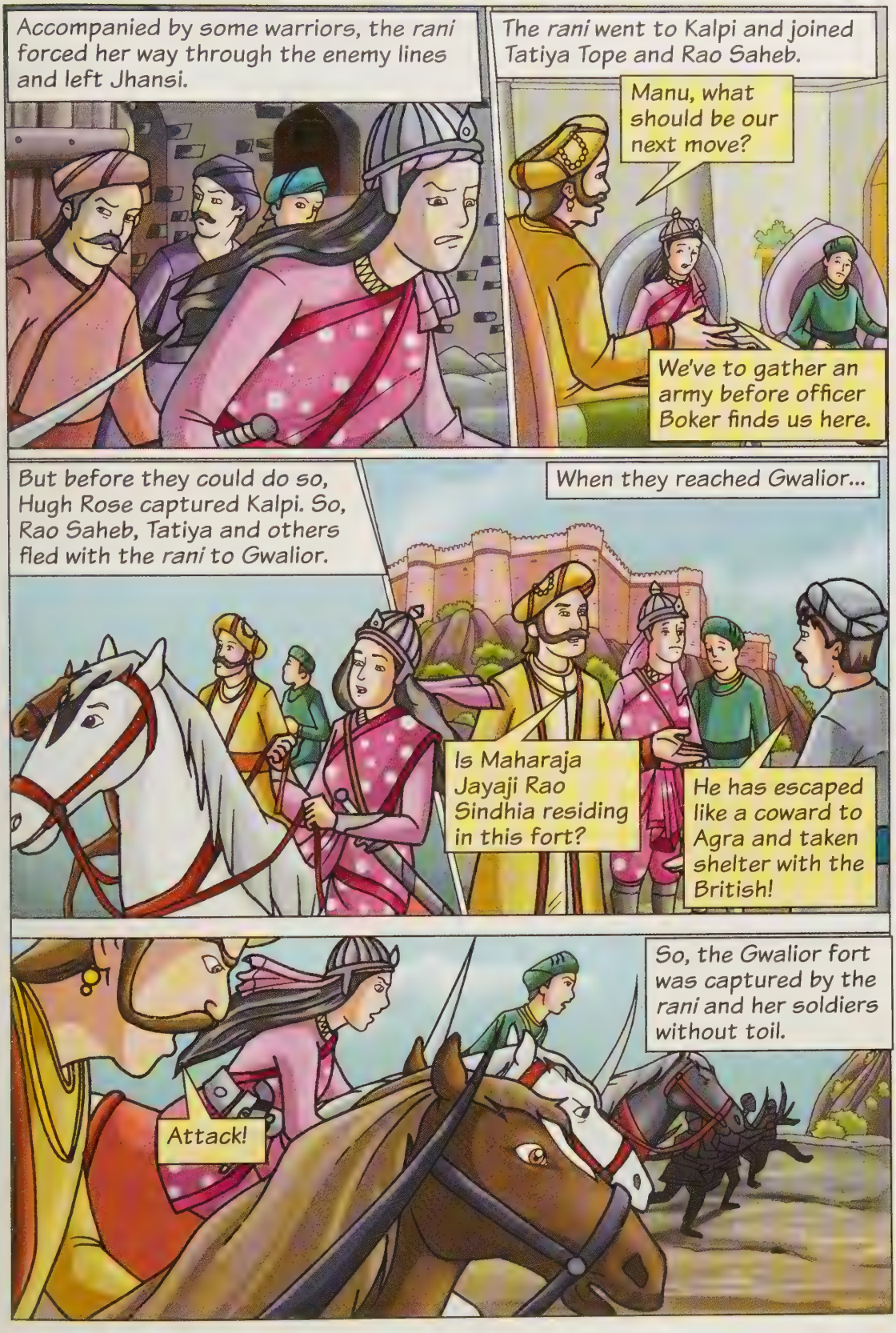
Rani Lakshmibai fought like a warrior goddess! So outstanding were her battle and organizational skills that even Hugh Rose was awed.

What a woman! What an amazing warrior!

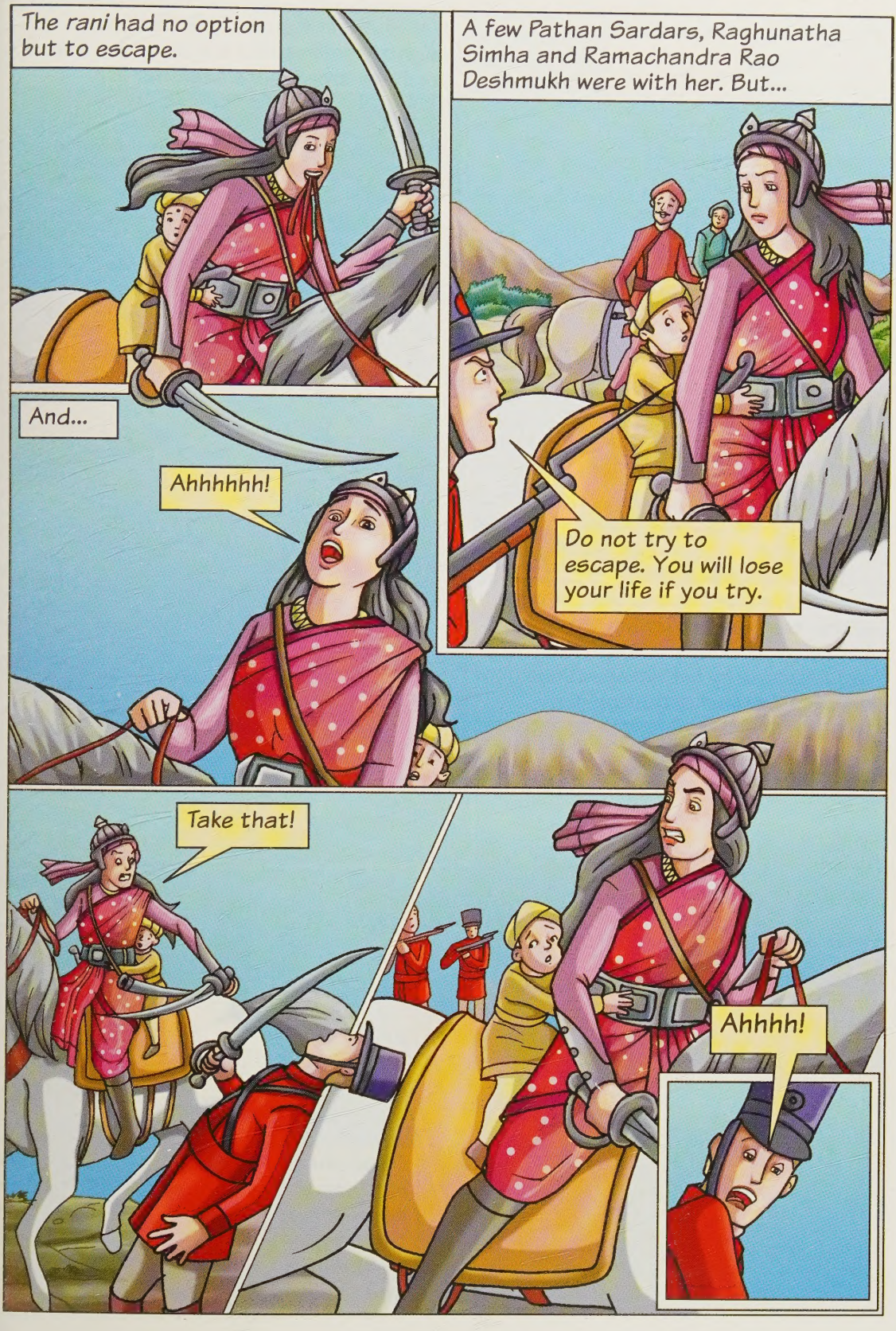
When the situation worsened, the *rani* called her courtiers and...

Of the four thousand soldiers, not even four hundred are alive now. The fort is also not strong.

We must leave this place at once, reorganize the army and then attack again.


Accompanied by some warriors, the rani forced her way through the enemy lines and left Jhansi.
The rani went to Kalpi and joined Tatiya Tope and Rao Saheb.
Manu, what should be our next move?
We've to gather an army before officer Boker finds us here.
But before they could do so, Hugh Rose captured Kalpi. So, Rao Saheb, Tatiya and others fled with the rani to Gwalior.
When they reached Gwalior...
Is Maharaja Jayaji Rao Sindhia residing in this fort?
He has escaped like a coward to Agra and taken shelter with the British!
Attack!
So, the Gwalior fort was captured by the rani and her soldiers without toil.

Meanwhile, Sir Hugh Rose played a very clever trick. He assured all the soldiers of Gwalior that he wanted Maharaja Jayaji Rao Sindhia to get back his kingdom from Tatiya and the rani.
Help your king to get back his kingdom.
It was decided that Kota ki Seria, southeast to Gwalior would be the place of attack on 6th June, 1858.
The battle was a fierce one. In spite of the rani's extraordinary bravery the much superior British force was having the upper hand.
On the eighteenth day of the battle, Rani Lakshmibai sent for Ramachandra Rao...
If I die, take care of my son, Damodar.
That day, a large number of the revolutionaries died and the British army entered the fort.


The rani had no option but to escape.
A few Pathan Sardars, Raghunatha Simha and Ramachandra Rao Deshmukh were with her. But...
Do not try to escape. You will lose your life if you try.
And...
Ahhhhhh!
Take that!
Ahhhh!

Har, har Mahadeva!
It was on 17th June, 1858 that the mighty rani became a martyr for the land she loved more than her life.
Rani Lakshmibai became the epitome of courage and patriotism, aptly summed up by General Hugh Rose who was defeated by her several times until inflicting the final defeat on her.
Of all the mutineers, the bravest and the greatest commander was the rani.
The End

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